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### UM recognizes honorary doctorate recipients, present and past

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## **NEWS RELEASE**

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This release is available electronically on INN (News Net).

May 14, 1997

### **UM RECOGNIZES HONORARY DOCTORATE RECIPIENTS, PRESENT AND PAST MISSOULA --**

Three Montanans who have made significant achievements in the business, literary and legal professions will receive one of The University of Montana's highest honors at May commencement ceremonies.

UM President George M. Dennison will confer honorary doctorates on Missoulians Dennis R. Washington, philanthropist and founder of Washington Corp., and James Welch, accomplished writer of novels about the West and Native Americans. The presentations will be made during UM's 100th Commencement Saturday, May 17.

Margery Hunter Brown, UM law professor emeritus, will receive an honorary Doctor of Laws degree during the School of Law's hooding ceremony at 10 a.m. Saturday, May 24, at the Montana Theatre in the Performing Arts and Radio/Television Center.

An honorary Doctor of Business Administration will be conferred on Washington in recognition of his accomplishments in construction, mining, shipping and railroad business ventures. A native of Spokane, Wash., he overcame a bout with polio as a youngster to embark on a career in construction at age 15.

With a \$30,000 loan, Washington launched his own construction firm in 1964 with three employees. His first contract came from the U.S. Forest Service to pave the parking lot at the Glacier

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National Park visitors' center atop Going to the Sun Highway. By 1969 Washington Construction was the largest contractor in Montana. Washington expanded into mining, buying and resurrecting the Anaconda Co.'s copper mines. Later, he purchased Burlington Northern Railroad's southern Montana rail system and renamed it Montana Rail Link.

Today Washington Corp. employs more than 3,000 people and generates more than \$700 million in sales annually. In 1988 the Dennis and Phyllis Washington Foundation was established to help disadvantaged youths and promote education. Washington has invested resources in support of causes that inspire and motivate young people to maximize their potential.

The Washingtons have been especially generous to The University of Montana with contributions that are visible across campus. They were major contributors to Washington-Grizzly Stadium and are financing the renovation of the historic Prescott House. They paid for the realignment of a dangerous curve on Campus Drive and donated the Center at Salmon Lake, which the University now rents to the public for conferences.

Welch, a **Browning** native and one of the most recognized UM graduates, will receive an honorary Doctor of Letters degree. A poet and author, Welch brought life on Montana's Hi-Line to the attention of readers worldwide with critically acclaimed novels "Winter in the Blood," "The Death of Jim Loney," "Fools Crow" and "The Indian Lawyer." His books have been translated and published in France, Italy, Germany, Holland, Japan, Sweden and England.

A 1965 graduate of UM with a bachelor's degree in liberal arts, Welch has long been a cornerstone of Missoula's famed writing community. He has taught writing at the University of Washington and Cornell University.

His work has earned him honors around the world. In 1995 Welch was knighted by the French



government when he received a "Chevalier de L'Ordre des Artes et des Lettres." He won the Pacific Northwest Booksellers Award for Poetry in 1975 and for fiction in 1987 and 1990. His many other honors include the Montana Governor's Award for the Arts in 1981, the Los Angeles Times Book Award for Fiction in 1987, the Montana Award in Humanities in 1988, the Native American Literature Prize in 1991 and a Doctor of Fine Arts degree from Rocky Mountain College in 1993.

Welch also served for a decade as vice chair of the Montana State Board of Pardons.

Brown has gained a national reputation as a scholar and advocate because of her work in Indian law. She nurtured and encouraged the development of strong tribal courts on Montana's reservations.

A Libby native, Brown earned a master's degree in history from UM in 1953. She worked as a reporter for the Great Falls Tribune and taught history and political science at Montana State University, Northern Montana College and UM. She also helped found the Bigfork Summer Playhouse.

Her first job upon graduation from UM's School of Law in 1975 was as an attorney for the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribal Court. She later returned to UM to teach law, and under her guidance the school's Indian Law Clinic was established. Her tenure at the law school included stints as associate dean and acting dean.

Through her counsel and example, Brown inspired and encouraged generations of UM law students, faculty and tribal judges, said law Dean E. Edwin Eck in nominating her for the honor.

Brown was one of 16 Montanans appointed to the Constitutional Revision Commission to study and evaluate the need for revision of Montana's 1889 Constitution. She then was appointed to the Constitutional Convention Commission to gather materials for the 1972 Constitutional Convention.



She later became one of Montana's top scholars of the state constitution.

In 1981 then-Gov. Ted Schwinden appointed Brown to the Human Rights Commission, on which she served eight years, including six years as chair. During her tenure the commission developed rules regarding sex discrimination in education and initiated projects designed to counter discrimination in housing, particularly against Native Americans.

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**Note:** Photos of the recipients are available upon request. Call Rita Munzenrider, assistant director for news, University Communications, (406) 243-4824.

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Local, dailies, weeklies, tribal newspapers

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